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ABSTRACT

Evaluation of freshman English programs is a process involving recursive steps, such as planning which elements to review, securing resources to carry out the review, actually reviewing the planned elements, and providing written reports to decision-makers. The four elements of an educational program--contexts, input, process, and product--cohere tightly, and all important elements in an educational program may have to be improved for significant change to occur. A professional evaluator of English programs plans the intensity of the review and is involved in deciding how to respond to the political-practical circumstances impinging on the review. An evaluator also needs substantial financial resources, a year or more of time, help from a committee, consultations with other professionals, secretarial services, and research and editorial assistance. Although not everyone agrees on the goals of an English program, an evaluator will describe the goals or contexts as they appear on the basis of documents, interviews, and observations. It is crucial that evaluators review human and non-human resources in most English programs. A comparison of a program's courses and sections with those of typical programs can be made, and if discrepancies exist, a formal report should suggest alternative procedures. Expert information on the evaluation elements of teaching-learning and achievements is readily available. Professional evaluators' insights can help make the process of evaluation fair, efficient, and thorough. (References are appended.) (NKA)

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Professional Evaluators' Insights Applied to Assisting Freshman English Programs

Mary Vroman Battle

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Professional Evaluators' Insights Applied to Assisting Freshman English Programs

Evaluations are the contemporary charge. States, universities, and colleges express dissatisfaction with graduates' writing and then evaluate freshman English programs. Sometimes, as in South Dakota, they use a value-added model of evaluation and expect improvement in terms of "change scores." When scores are deemed unsatisfactory, they recommend improvement in goals and instruction.

On the other hand, the chair and faculty of many departments of English thus evaluated frequently know that too much must be taught to too many underprepared freshmen through too few, often transient instructors. In short, resources are limited.

Since evaluations seem to be here to stay, what can we in English do beyond sigh? One response is to show concern for our students by deepening and broadening evaluations to make them more complete and fair. To augment what we already know, we can turn to professional evaluators for insights and methods.

Here such insights are selected from more than a dozen professional evaluators. These insights will be explained in the order in which evaluators from inside or outside English departments might use them as parts of evaluating a freshman English program.

Planning

Sometimes evaluators within English conceive of evaluation as the simple activity of reviewing students' achievement scores. However,

many professional evaluators assert that evaluation is a process (PDK 40), much as writing is a process, and involves recursive steps. These steps include planning which elements to review, securing resources to carry out the review, actually reviewing the planned elements, and providing written reports to those who make decisions.

When beginning to plan, an evaluator is well advised to heed Stufflebeam, chairman for a Phi Delta Kappa (PDK) Committee (PDK 218-222), and consider whether to review one, several, or all four elements of an educational program. The elements, which form the CIPP model, are contexts, input, process, and product. "Contexts" are the purposes or goals of a program, Aristotle's (12) efficient cause. "Input" refers to the sum of the human and non-human resources for a program, that is, the faculty, students, and all materials, Aristotle's material cause. "Process" refers to the activities of teaching, learning, and decision-making, Aristotle's formal cause. "Product" refers to the freshmen's achieved skills and arts in communicating through English written discourse, Aristotle's final cause.

As a brief history of professional evaluation shows, these elements of an educational program cohere tightly. Many years ago evaluators looked only at products. In 1932, Tyler (498-499) improved evaluation by studying whether the carefully stated educational objectives (contexts) were achieved in the students' final scores (product). In the 1970's many teachers in secondary schools found a need to expand Tyler's approach. When large numbers of underprepared students entered their classrooms, they raised the slogan "No evaluation without remediation." These teachers asked that neither

their instruction (process) nor the students' achievements (products) be judged without opportunity for students to be given adequate preparation (input). This history implies that all four elements of English papers should be evaluated.

In addition to planning the elements to review, an evaluator of English programs plans the intensity of the review. A "formative" evaluation, according to Scriven (40-43), is designed to improve or alter a program through dialogue among relevant persons while the program is in progress. This dialogue, termed "feedback" (PDK 254-255) and indicated on evaluator's models as loops on a flow chart, makes formative evaluation likely to win cooperation from all persons involved. A "summative" evaluation reviews a program to judge it overall and to determine whether to continue it or terminate it. "Monitoring," a hybrid type of evaluation, employs formative evaluation from outside the program for the purpose of support or intervention.

Planning also involves deciding how to respond to the political-practical circumstances impinging on the review. Professional evaluators, for instance, clarify their charges in writing, assess the possibility that their evaluations will be utilized (Rossi and Freeman 307, 313, 320-328), and discover what constraints exist (Rossi and Freeman 308, 309, 313, 316-319; Worthen and Sanders 346-347).

Then an evaluator gathers his or her resources (PDK 165-167, 244). From the outset, part of the total annual budget of a program should be designated for evaluation, and the sum should be substantial. Educational research for developing "a new curriculum or classroom procedure" along with arranging the concomitant evaluation is

expensive; still it costs only 1% of designing and testing an automobile engine, and it is likely to bring "enormously more important" benefits, namely, "enlightened citizens" (Scriven 83). In addition to money, an evaluator probably needs a year or more of time, help of a committee, consultations with a professional evaluator, secretarial services, a research assistant, and editorial assistance.

Reviewing Goals or Contexts

Then comes the actual review. Professional evaluators offer many alternative methods for reviewing the goals, resources, processes of teaching-learning, and achievements. A few methods follow.

Not everyone agrees on the goals of freshman English. According to a national survey of one hundred programs (Witte, Cherry, and Meyer 29), directors of writing programs perceive that "writing mechanically correct prose" is the real goal (69%) as well as the goal of the department (56%), university (68%), and society (72%). However, instructors in the programs perceive that "writing coherent prose" is the real goal (61%) although not the goal of the department (18%), university (22%), or society (23%). "The differences suggest that any attempt to evaluate freshman writing programs must begin by addressing those different perceptions" (Witte, Cherry, and Meyer 1).

An evaluator of an English program's goals or contexts will undoubtedly describe the goals as they appear on the basis of documents, interviews, and observations. He or she may also assess these goals in a variety of ways. One way is to learn the "perceived needs" (Rossi and Freeman 99-106) of all those who have a right or "stake" in the program. These "stakeholders" include the students and the instructors of the courses as well as other members of the English

department, non-English faculty members, college and university administrators, parents, and citizens of the state. After describing each group, an evaluator can assess the members' immediate and ultimate goals by a well-designed questionnaire sent to a stratified random sample. The questionnaire could use items that express levels of achievement in terms taken from taxonomies of cognitive and affective educational objectives (Bloom et al.; Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia). After analysis is complete, if the groups disagree widely about needs, it is not advantageous, Hammond and Popham agree (168; 38), to proceed with the review. Dialogue among stakeholders should take place until enlightened agreement is reached.

Reviewing Resources or Input

Next, outside evaluators of an English program may assume that human as well as non-human resources are standard and, therefore, overlook evaluating them. Indeed, educational reformers tend to pass over input lightly while stressing course goals, instruction, and outcomes. However, as Charles Cooper states, "students need to read and write a lot, and they need response to their efforts from intelligent, caring teachers" (3). Cooper's statement translates in part into teachable class sizes and line-items in the budget for well-qualified instructors and professors. Even a cursory glance gives evidence of the need to evaluate human resources. Although it is a major factor in final achievements (Battle 5-10), the students' entering preparations vary considerably, even when developmental courses exist (Bowles 2-3). Class sizes in pre-standard courses of up to 100 freshmen instead of 30 to 35 were justified by an experimenter when his study found significantly better gains on the standardized

Iowa Test of Educational Development (ITED) for the larger classes (Silver), although it is not clear what the course taught. One community college in Texas, Kinneavy reported, had 59 part-time instructors, 1 full-time instructor, and no faculty meetings. Typically in public universities, according to a national survey (Witte, Cherry, and Meyer 46), instructors of freshman English are 54% graduate assistants; 19% part-time instructors; 13% full-time, non-tenure-track faculty; and 14% tenure-track faculty. Thus it is crucial that evaluators plan to review human and non-human resources in most English programs.

An evaluator of resources, or "input," can readily describe the students in terms of number in each section, reading level, writing level, and ACT-English; instructors in terms of number, rank, education, experience, and salary; and other stakeholders in appropriate terms. He or she may also assess these resources by sending a questionnaire to all persons who expressed needs or rights and this time ask what their perceived responsibilities for and actual contributions to the program are. How much time do students perceive that they owe and do they give to homework? How many hours weekly do instructors feel they owe and do they contribute to various aspects of the program, such as, commenting on compositions, growing professionally, and doing research? What contributions do other members of the English department make, such as, serving on relevant committees within the department or in the rest of the university to communicate needs of the freshman program; supporting tenure and promotion; contributing to research; seeking funds for travel and development; and assisting new colleagues? Do non-English faculty

reinforce what is taught in English by using writing as a tool for teaching their own disciplines? Do administrators provide the freshman program with funds for full-time faculty, salaries, office space, secretarial service, professional development, formative evaluation, photocopies, travel to conferences, and released time for research? Does the state set aside line-items in the budget for the faculty of freshman English programs and tax adequately? These sample questions make it clear that every person who has a right to benefit from the English program has a corresponding responsibility to contribute to the program.

At this point, professional evaluators might use Provus' discrepancy model (245) to search for any gaps between what any group expects as goals and what that group gives as resources. For example, are students who want to pass but who have inadequate preparation doing enough homework and using laboratories? Are instructors giving appropriate and healthy amounts of time to students' compositions, professional growth, and research? Are other members of the English department who expect students to write excellent papers in advanced courses giving adequate support to the program's funding needs? Are non-English faculty who expect correct academic writing in their disciplines using sufficient, appropriate writing to enable students to learn the concepts of those disciplines? Are college and university administrators supporting their desires for grants, research, and prestige by providing enough line-items in the budget, enough sections to permit reasonable class size, and enough credit hours for the course? Many additional possible questions arise, such

as those in Witte and Faigley's Evaluating College Writing Programs (63-65, 75-77).

The evaluator of an English program who seeks to answer these questions about adequacies may, as Dorine said in Tartuffe (Molière 2.4. 111), have to "use all manner of means, and all at once." The evaluator can first place together each groups' answers to both questionnaires. He or she can compare the names of students who were recommended to laboratories with the names of those who actually attended. He or she can compare the time instructors and professors actually gave to reading compositions with the time instructors and professors typically give--twenty minutes each paper (Williams 13). One can determine whether funding is adequate for teachable class sizes by consulting research, such as Glass' meta-analysis on class size (42-44); making comparisons with maximum professional standards ADE, MLA (2), and NCTE (873); and performing small-scale experiments with various class sizes. It may be possible to replicate Weiss and Walter's Latin-square procedure to check whether non-English faculty members increase their students' learning more when they use writing than when they do not use writing. Furthermore, an evaluator can compare his or her program's courses and sections with those of typical programs, such as, those described by Witte et al. (21-23); bring in an outside consultant; or form inter-departmental committees.

If discrepancies exist, a formal report should be written which suggests alternative procedures. Unless goals are sought by means of adequate resources, it is highly unlikely that either the process of instruction or the students' achievements will be satisfactory.

Reviewing Process and Product

Of course, evaluators frequently review the other two elements, teaching-learning and achievements. A review of all four elements is important because, as the Carnegie Task Force reports (11), all important elements in an educational program may have to be improved for significant change to occur.

An evaluator who reviews the third element, the processes of teaching-learning, can turn to work already done by CCCC (213-229) under Richard Larson's committee. Since the instructional activities that were found in the national survey (Witte et al. 60) to be most effective in public universities, that is, teaching revision (72%) and holding conferences (44%), are highly time consuming, these activities may be given special attention.

An evaluator of the fourth element, students' achievements in reading and writing, can seek information from Cooper and Odell's Evaluating Writing (1977); publications of the National Testing Network in Writing (1981-1986); Davis, Scriven, and Thomas' The Evaluation of Composition Instruction; Witte and Faigley's Evaluating College Writing Programs; and Edward White's Teaching and Assessing Writing. A search for measures of achievement in reading non-fictive literature can be undertaken. Questions concerning all four elements can be found in A Checklist and Guide for Reviewing Departments of English published by the Association of Departments of English.

Writing the Concluding Report

Once the goals, resources, processes, and achievements have been reviewed, professional evaluators prepare a report for those who make decisions. These experts provide two insights for assisting freshmen

English. The first is the practice of including in the report what Rossi and Freeman (267-297) call "cost-effectiveness analyses." Cost-effectiveness analyses are calculations of a program's costs in dollars but of a program's results in students' achievements. For example, an English program for a special group of freshmen might cost a great deal but might give the students access to long-term success and help the university retain students.

The second practice, used especially by Scriven (69-70), Stake (181), and Stake and Denny (373), is including one last element in the report. This element will be explained through two brief anecdotes that reveal a characteristic of some faculty members in English departments. A researcher, Stalnacker, is said (Diederich 49) to have asked a group of English teachers to rank a set of student compositions into five equal piles in order to merit, marking the highest pile 4, the next pile 3, and so on down to 0. After completing the task, the teachers said that they could find no 4 papers and had placed the papers into five piles, ranking them 3, 2, 1, 0, and 00. Similarly, on another occasion, when the English committee of an accreditation team evaluated the English program of a superb private school, the committee members found twenty weaknesses and few strengths until their chair urged them to look for positive qualities. However, the other committees on the accreditation team assessed the English program as the finest in the school, a conclusion supported by high SAT-scores and other criteria.

Therefore, let us speak heartily for the worth of our freshman English programs. Freshman English courses are likely to be the most challenging courses in a university, the most demanding for students

to learn, and the most difficult for faculty to teach. But these valuable courses in English are the heart of the university.

A success story about the benefits of evaluation comes from Weaver (13). By consensus, the faculty of Anderson College, Indiana, established a standard for writing competency. This standard was suited to a diverse group of readers (Hake) because differences among raters were compensated for statistically through a computer program. Whereas raters of compositions across the university gave fairly uniform scores, English had the most extremely high or low raters. Results: English now works to articulate goals; English no longer reserves A for a paper ready for The New Yorker; each freshman's writing is evaluated twice a semester by someone other than the English instructor or professor; and only when freshmen can express their main ideas and support them with details are they urged to notice surface features.

Evaluation is not easy, but it is necessary to the full existence of our freshmen, departments, universities, profession, and nation. Professional evaluators' insights just described as well as others in the ample literature can help make the process of evaluation fair, efficient, and thorough. It is especially important to evaluate goals, resources, processes of instruction, and achievements, the resources being most in need of review. These few insights culled from the rest show that professional evaluators can help us support the English programs that enlighten our students, those whom Milton called in "Lycidas" (107) our "dearest pledge[s]."

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